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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: priority theme: challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls

High-level round table on challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls

Chairs' summary

1. On 10 March 2014, the Commission on the Status of Women held a high-level round table on challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. The high-level round table focused on the sharing of national experiences, lessons learned and good practices. A discussion guide provided the framework for the interactive dialogue.

2. The high-level round table was organized in two parallel sessions in order to allow for interaction among the large number of participants. The Chair of the Commission, Libran Cabactulan, and the Vice-Chair of the Commission, Carlos García González, presided over the sessions. The meeting opened with the screening of a short video on challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. In total, 46 government representatives made statements, as did a representative of the European Union. The following invited representatives of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations took part in the interactive dialogue: Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Lakshmi Puri; Chair of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice, Frances Raday; Special

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Adviser to the Secretary-General on Post-2015 Development Planning, Amina Mohammed; and Gita Senof Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era.

3. Speakers reaffirmed the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. While considerable progress had been made towards achieving the Goals, overall progress on gender equality and women's rights remained uneven. The eradication of extreme poverty and hunger under Goal 1 was one area where challenges persisted and targets had not been met. Participants reported some success through various poverty-reduction strategies undertaken at the national level. Serious gender gaps existed, however, resulting in the increased feminization of poverty. There was agreement that poverty eradication was at the heart of achieving the Millennium Development Goals and any new development agenda for the post-2015 era, and that unless the gender dimensions of Goal 1 were addressed progress in meeting the Goal would stall.

4. Participants mentioned that significant progress had been made on girls' primary education, and the Millennium Development Goals were credited with ensuring that the issue received global attention. Participants referred to good practices in national education policies focused on girls' education, such as training for girls in both urban and rural areas, free education and school books, among others. While gender parity in primary education had been achieved, however, regional and socioeconomic disparities were discernable and progress on girls' secondary and tertiary education was still lagging. Furthermore, participants noted that even though enrolment rates had increased significantly, the quality of education remained an issue in terms of curricula and learning, as well as safety and security, including the inadequacy of facilities for girls. Participants expressed concern that the lack of progress on secondary and tertiary education and the quality of education at all levels posed a significant risk to the next generation of girls and young women.

5. Progress in meeting the health-related targets had been mixed. With regard to Goal 4, on reducing child mortality, and Goal 5, on improving maternal health, participants highlighted some good practices in health-care service provision, such as training of midwives, free medical examinations and other services, immunization programmes and implementation at the community level. Despite some successful programmes, many participants said that Goal 6, on combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, had not been met. It was suggested that progress on meeting health targets had been slow because the issue of sexual and reproductive health and rights had not been explicitly or adequately addressed in the Millennium Development Goals. That issue must be taken into account in setting targets if development goals were to be achieved.

6. Progress for women and girls in achieving the Millennium Development Goals had often been achieved through the prioritization of universally accessible public services, social protection and quality infrastructure. That included quality education, in particular at the secondary level, care services, multisectoral services to respond to violence against women and girls, and health services that address women's and girls' right to health, including sexual and reproductive health, at all stages of life. Some participants pointed to the need to focus on local service delivery for women and girls. Social protection had played an important role in implementing the Goals for women and girls, in particular in the areas of poverty

and hunger, employment and child health. Several participants highlighted the contribution of policies in support of mothers with low incomes, single-parent households and older women, as well as maternity entitlements and pensions. Ensuring access to quality infrastructure for water and sanitation, for example, was identified as particularly important for women's and girls' health, dignity and safety. Other policies to implement the Goals for women and girls had prioritized infrastructure development in areas of energy, electricity and transport services.

7. Several participants mentioned that the promotion of decent work for women was fundamental for creating a just society. In that regard, numerous efforts at the national level to increase women's participation in the labour market were noted, such as anti-discrimination measures in the workplace, laws against sexual harassment and the implementation of gender-sensitive policies and actions, including the provision of child care, flexible working arrangements, such as compressed work schedules, to enable both women and men to combine work with family responsibilities. Despite those efforts, however, most participants noted that gender equality in the labour market remained a major challenge and that significant gaps in the employment rates of women and men persisted. Women were overrepresented in informal employment and were paid less for work of equal value. Significant efforts would be needed to achieve gender equality in that area and to empower women.

8. Participants noted another significant barrier to women's participation in the labour market on an equal basis with men: their lack of assets, including land, other property and financial assets. That was seen as a key gap in the Millennium Development Goals and one that needed to be recognized. Several speakers highlighted the need to include women's ownership and control over land and other assets, including financial assets, in the post-2015 agenda. Some pointed out that women's access to financial assets should not be limited to microfinance.

9. Participants reported that progress had been made in women's representation in parliaments and within political parties as a result of temporary special measures adopted in some countries. Quotas and other affirmative action measures had proved to be important and effective vehicles for increasing women's political participation. Nonetheless, globally, women continued to be underrepresented in decision-making processes, including in parliaments, public administration, the judiciary and the private sector. A critical requirement for achieving the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls was their participation at all levels of decision-making, in both public and private institutions. Women's effective participation in all decision-making forums would enable them to influence public policies and spending priorities so as to make progress towards adequately addressing women's needs and priorities, including the provision of quality services, access to justice, the protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the gender-responsive management of resources.

10. It was recognized that, overall, efforts made to achieve Goal 8, on global partnerships, had been inadequate, as had contributions in terms of official development assistance, especially with respect to gender equality. The need for greater development cooperation, capacity-building, sharing of good practices, and increased transfer of technology was expressed, as well as the need for an increase in resources across sectors to invest in accountability mechanisms and gender-responsive planning and budgeting and to scale up and replicate good

practices. Calls were made for improved South-South and North-South cooperation and engagement in meaningful global partnerships.

11. Participants drew attention to the failure of the Millennium Development Goals to address violence against women and girls. They recognized the devastating consequences of such violence for individuals, families and societies, and the fact that it took a variety of forms, including trafficking, psychological abuse, harmful traditional practices and harassment, and was perpetrated at home, at work, in schools and in other contexts. Although legal and policy reforms had been made to address violence against women, effective implementation and enforcement remained a challenge, especially at the local and community levels. Participants agreed that violence against women and girls was a universal problem and that, as the "missing" Millennium Development Goal, its inclusion in any forthcoming development framework was crucial.

12. According to participants, the Millennium Development Goals had insufficiently addressed the disproportionate impact of climate change, natural and other disasters, economic and political crises, and conflict on women and girls. Such crises and disasters impeded progress in meeting targets for development. Participants emphasized the importance of women's participation in peacebuilding processes to achieving and sustaining peace. Participants called for economic and climate justice targets to be considered in the post-2015 development agenda and, in particular, for gender-responsive targets to be mainstreamed across the three dimensions (social, economic and environmental) of the sustainable development goals in the post-2015 development agenda.

13. Several participants identified the disproportionate share of unpaid care work done by women and girls as an obstacle to achieving gender equality and the Millennium Development Goals, as it held them back from enjoying rights in several areas, including employment, education, health and political participation. At the same time, the lack of progress in achieving the Goals, for example in the area of water and sanitation, often intensified women's unpaid work burden, as it was mainly women who were responsible for water collection. Participants emphasized the need to recognize unpaid care work as a social responsibility to be shared by all. Policies aiming to reduce and redistribute unpaid care work included childcare services, social services and initiatives reconciling work and family life. Unpaid care work was highlighted as a priority for the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals.

14. It was noted that Millennium Development Goal targets based on global and national averages had masked the unevenness of achievements across the population and the position of disadvantage occupied by marginalized groups of women and girls who experience multiple forms of inequalities. Inequalities based on income, geographical location, age, disability and other context-specific characteristics intersected with gender and impeded the achievement of the Goals for marginalized groups of women and girls. A concerted effort was needed to address those multiple inequalities, ensure the achievement of the Goals for the most marginalized groups and lay the ground for the post-2015 development agenda.

15. Institutional arrangements such as national development plans and poverty reduction strategies were critical for the effective implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. Participants highlighted the need to strengthen institutional capacity through increased funding for gender equality, the

provision of training on gender analysis and gender-responsive budgeting, and the promotion of such analysis and budgeting in all line ministries.

16. Questions of monitoring, evaluation, data availability and accountability also received considerable attention. Several participants noted that the dearth of gender statistics had made it difficult to monitor progress on the Millennium Development Goals from a gender perspective. Among the key reasons identified was the weak capacity at the national level to produce gender statistics, which was linked to underinvestment in that area. Participants noted that accountability, governance and adequate monitoring would be key for the success of the post-2015 framework. Although there had been progress in terms of the availability of gender statistics since the Goals had been developed, countries still did not have adequate baseline data on several dimensions of gender equality and women's rights. Much work needed to be done to make sure that the data revolution would address gender statistics adequately. Participants highlighted the need for improved data collection efforts, in particular with respect to violence against women and time use.

17. Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring the full enjoyment of human rights for achieving the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls beyond their target date, drawing attention to civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. For example, the pervasiveness of violence against women constituted a grave violation of human rights and was a drag on sustainable development. Unequal inheritance rights are a violation of human rights and prevent women and girls from equally benefiting from sustainable development. Women's lack of voice in decision-making at all levels is a violation of human rights and impedes achievement of the Goals. Some participants articulated the links between the implementation of the Goals for women and girls and existing international commitments to promote gender equality and women's rights, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). Looking forward, many participants stressed the importance of anchoring the post-2015 development agenda and the future sustainable development goals in international human rights obligations.

18. Participants also stressed the importance of a coherent legal and policy framework in guaranteeing women's human rights, promoting gender equality and achieving the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. A strong legal framework, inclusive of the constitution and grounded in human rights principles, was essential to ensuring that gains made in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment would withstand political or regime changes. Political will and commitments from governments were needed to ensure that the legal and policy framework would be gender responsive and effectively implemented and enforced.

19. Building on the lessons of the Millennium Development Goals, there was widespread support for a stand-alone goal on gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment and the comprehensive integration of gender equality as a cross-cutting issue to be addressed in the future sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda. Several participants highlighted that such a goal should address those high-priority issues that would transform structural gender inequalities, including: violence against women and girls; child, early and forced marriage; sexual and reproductive health and rights; women's access to and control over assets and productive resources; girls' and women's right to a quality education

at all levels; women's access to decent work and the elimination of the gender wage gap; women's universal access to social protection and services; women's disproportionate share of unpaid care work; and women's leadership and partnership at all levels. Several participants highlighted that gender equality remained a universal challenge: no country had achieved it. The future framework should therefore apply to all people, in all countries.